

Anti-Inflation Act

Then there would be a period of adjustment to correct imbalances and inequities and to promote a climate of mutual trust. Unions and businessmen would have been invited to sit down with us. We have heard about the consensus program. This would have come after the freeze. But what my colleagues across the aisle do not understand is that a consensus program in an area of mutual distrust will never work. The former minister of finance learned that in his attempt to carry out such a program.

● (1640)

Because there is no trust among unions and businessmen and no leadership in our country, I fear this program is doomed to failure. Leadership is not something you can announce in the House of Commons or during an election; it is something you have to demonstrate and something you have to practice by example. You cannot announce leadership and ask the people to engage in blind trust.

We know all about blind trust. When it comes to conflict of interest, blind trust, in the eyes of our colleagues from across the aisle, simply means that if you are in a leading government position, a position of power in the cabinet or in the civil service, you pass your shares in private corporations which may benefit from any decision you make in your position of power to a good friend, who will hold the shares in his name. Of course, you still dictate the policy and you still decide when to sell and when to buy. That is blind trust.

An hon. Member: And urbanetics.

Mr. Oberle: Urbanetics is one example, yes. The people of Canada will not engage in that kind of blind trust. One of the concerns I have results from a comparison of the guidelines which the Minister of Finance (Mr. Macdonald) has proposed to the House, with the rent controls a socialist government has introduced in the province of British Columbia. I fear that they will assure, for the next four years, a 10 per cent rate of inflation.

The government of British Columbia has imposed rental guidelines over the last two years, and rents have risen higher than they have in the city of Toronto which has a problem equal to that of the city of Vancouver. The reason is that there were guidelines, and everyone who rented to anyone felt compelled to increase rents in accordance with those guidelines. There is no provision in the guidelines to the effect that anyone who might not need a 10 per cent increase can ask for less. In fact, no one will bargain for less than 10 per cent.

An hon. Member: This is built-in inflation.

Mr. Oberle: Businesses will have to increase their prices three times a year, because that is what the guidelines tell them to do. They would need their heads examined if they did not do that, because the guidelines say they need their profits and need an increase of 10 per cent. What this program does is guarantee that there will be a 10 per cent inflation factor for the next four years. This bill totally ignores the fact that the United States will have half the rate of inflation next year and that industrial countries such as Germany and European Common Market countries will have a much lower degree of inflation, with fewer problems.

[Mr. Oberle.]

This program will depend for its success on whether the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance can again fool most of the people of Canada. The success of the guidelines will depend upon whether the government will listen to what the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) will have to say, and will listen to what members of the committee suggest during the committee proceedings. There will be some very significant amendments made to these guidelines and to the bill. They will have to be accepted before Canadians and members on this side of the House will accept and support this kind of program.

I should have thought it was important, and in the interest of the survival of our economy, for the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister to display some statesmanship as did the leader of the New Democratic Party when he said the Leader of the Official Opposition had paid the political price for offering to co-operate in every way possible in respect of wage and price controls. I would have expected the Prime Minister to give the Leader of the Opposition credit for having paid that price by stating the government wants to co-operate with the opposition because it needs the opposition and its support in order to sell this program to Canadians.

We do not want to be entirely negative about this program, even though it addresses itself to the wrong area entirely. The program has to be backed up with strict monetary and fiscal policies. Let me say, on behalf of my colleagues, that we are prepared to allow this bill to go to the committee, but if the type of cheap political trickery is displayed in the committee that has been displayed by the Minister of Finance in this House, I fear for the success of the program because it seems doomed to failure. Canadians will not put up with this kind of thing any longer. It is important that more people than the Leader of the Opposition and his colleagues look at the interests of their country first, and the interests of their party and their political future second.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, on page 21 of the white paper which the government tabled on October 14 as a prelude to Bill C-73, I find these two sentences:

Some groups have fallen behind in the last two or three years because of the time at which their contracts were negotiated or for other reasons. It is essential that they should be provided with an opportunity to catch up.

I suggest that I am not wrenching anything out of its context or doing any damage to those two sentences if I leave out some of the words in the middle and make the statement more direct by putting it in these words, "Some groups have fallen behind in the last two or three years. They should be provided with an opportunity to catch up."

My remarks this afternoon in this debate on second reading of Bill C-73 will be concerned entirely with certain groups that have fallen behind and which in my view should be given the opportunity to catch up, and I call for action to make that possible right away. Whatever we on the opposition side may think about Bill C-73 or the orders and regulations that are to be made under it, it is obvious that the government is determined to use its power and its majority to put this legislation through and to put this program of economic controls into effect. That being the